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A VISIT TO SKOMER ISLAND.

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IN delightful weather at the end of May I was able to gratify a long-formed wish to visit Skomer Island, and to make acquaintance with its birds, especially with the Manx Shearwaters. I had the advantage of the company of Mr. Mortimer Propert, of St. Davids, who is an enthusiastic oologist. Received with no little kindness by the hospitable occupier of the island and his family, we saw the sights of his interesting domain under most favourable circumstances, and much that is stated below is the result of information which he imparted to us.

Skomer Island lies off the south-west of Pembrokeshire, at the southern extremity of St. Bride's Bay, corresponding with Ramsey Island, which occupies a similar position to the north, and like the sister island is parted from the mainland by a narrow sound of deep water through which the tide rushes with great force. The sounds which part the two islands from the shore have besides the same characteristic in being studded with rocks, which render them rather dangerous for navigation when there is anything like a sea on, which is generally the case. In area Skomer contains about 700 acres. All over its surface large citadel-looking rocks crop up, and give to the island its name, which is taken from a Danish word signifying "the rocky." Remains of an ancient occupation are visible in sepulchral barrows, and in the rough outlines of dwelling-places and enclosures. A conspicuous mark on the eastern side of the



island is a lofty upright stone. There are similar stones on the mainland, which are said to mark victories gained by Harold over the Danes. The village of Haroldston takes its name from such a memorial.

A visitor to the island in the summer-time is struck with astonishment at the vast multitudes of Puffins which resort to it for nesting. They are everywhere, and are so tame that they hardly trouble to move out of one's way. In walking, you are sure sooner or later to find your foot slipping through into some Puffin's burrow, astonishing the bird sitting placidly on its egg. The whole demeanour of the Puffins may be said to be placid. It is not easy either to hurry them or to frighten them. Every now and then they may be seen scuttling out of their holes and making off in a ridiculous manner, rolling and tumbling head over heels before at last they can rise on wing. Unless they face the wind, or are on an eminence, Puffins are unable to fly, and when these conditions are not present to them they may be easily caught. All along the edge of the cliffs they were to be seen thickly congregated; their white breasts turned towards us had the appearance of monster snow-flakes. The only notice taken by the birds of our approach was to fall in in closer order, the outside ones advancing together with an absurd kind of military precision until the host was drawn up on the brink of the cliff four or five deep. And even then, unless one went close up to them, they remained stolidly motionless, regarding the stranger with no apprehension and with much indifference out of their queer little eyes. Throw a stone at them, and the bird near which it passes will only duck its head. As we were watching a great body of Puffins, wheeling backwards and forwards over the water, we suddenly noticed one with pure white wings, which was a very conspicuous object among its companions. After a while this bird flew several times close by where we were seated, and might easily have been dropped had a gun been at hand. The Puffins arrive on Skomer with great punctuality on the 1st of April, and leave the island early in August. The Manx Shearwaters are a little earlier in coming and later in their departure.

In the bird way Skomer possesses two phenomena, one being the great multitude of its Puffins, the other the equally vast hosts of the Manx Shearwaters. During the daytime none of the

Shearwaters were visible, being all asleep in their burrows. Anyone walking over the island might have little notion of the vast population slumbering just under his feet, in the deepest rabbit-earths, or in holes of their own excavation. Since the Sea Birds Preservation Act was passed, the rabbits on Skomer have greatly diminished in numbers; the annual take, which used to be 9000, is now barely 3000. As the rabbits are the chief produce of the island, this represents a serious loss. The Herring Gulls are the greatest depredators, being for ever on the hunt for young rabbits; and the Puffins and Shearwaters are continually worrying the breeding rabbits in their burrows, thus contributing their share to the mischief. The Shearwaters do not emerge from their holes until dark. At 10 p.m. there was no sign of them, but going out at midnight the whole island seemed alive, and the air vocal with their unearthly wailing cry.

From the sky above, from the ground at one's feet, and from below the ground, the noise proceeded, and was compared by a friend to the cry of jackals at night, and it seemed to us that the words "Come over the wall," "Come under the wall," rapidly repeated in a sibilant whisper, would represent the sound which surrounded us. It was not a deafening noise, far from it; rather a soft, weird, and unearthly chorus, resembling nothing we had ever listened to before. It was too dark to see the birds, unless they flew directly overhead, but we could hear them fluttering close by, and feel our cheeks fanned by their wings. They were also to be heard beating along the ground at our feet; for, like the Puffin, the Shearwater is unable to rise unless it is on sloping ground, or is assisted by the wind. A setter we had with us caught the birds and brought them to our hands uninjured as fast as we could take them from her; and it would have been easy in this manner to have captured hundreds, or aided by a lantern to have run down the birds and knocked them over with sticks. One night we were told that the farm servants actually destroyed a multitude in this manner, and that the bodies of the birds were ploughed into the ground as a dressing for wheat. Alas, poor "cockles"! to what vile uses did they come. N.B. "Cockle" is the local name for the Manx Shearwater, from the noise the bird makes when its nest is dug into. The night we spent upon the island the wailing of the birds was incessant

until about 3 a.m., and at the first streak of dawn it died away, as they then retired to their holes.

We were out early in the morning to perambulate the island, and came upon a single Shearwater at the mouth of its burrow, and no rabbit could have made a more precipitate bolt than it did on our approach. After peering into many rabbit-holes we at last found one in which a "cockle" was to be seen, distant about an arm's length, sitting either asleep or upon its egg; and not coveting its treasure, after a good look into the hole we left it undisturbed. We searched in vain for the White-winged Puffin, which was either out on the water, in its hole, or somewhere else out of sight. On the top of the island we came upon numerous Sea Pies, nesting in the stunted heather and fern. The old birds wheeling above our heads and keeping up an incessant piping of alarm and anger, were very handsome objects, with their vividly-contrasted black and white plumage standing out well against the blue sky. We could find no eggs, and all the birds seemed to have young; and it was not long before some little chicks were detected crouching beneath the shooting bracken. These bore a great resemblance to young Peewits, but had far stouter legs. We sat down for some time opposite a grand cliff at Wick Haven, on the south-west side of the island, which swarmed with myriads of birds. The lower ledges were occupied by countless Kittiwakes seated on or beside their nests, which, like the structures of the House Martin, seemed made with mud. On the higher ledges sat Razor-billed Auks and Guillemots row upon row, in places five and six deep, and every coign of vantage on the top of the cliff was occupied by the inevitable Puffin. A babel of sounds came forth from these innumerable birds, the hoarse cackle of the Kittiwakes, which seemed to formulate the complaint, "tobacco I want, tobacco I want," prevailing over all.

Walking further on we came to a spot where a little colony of Lesser Black-backed Gulls had taken up a station on the top of the cliff, and soon found several nests containing eggs. A little later I nearly trod upon a Whimbrel among the fern. The bird walked slowly off, trailing its wings—suspicious behaviour which made me search for its nest, but none was found. It would have been a grand discovery could Whimbrel's eggs have been detected so far south as Skomer. Choughs and Ravens were

noticed about the cliffs, but the absence of all hawks surprised us; not even a Kestrel was visible. We were told that a pair of Peregrines had an eyrie upon the island, and that Buzzards sometimes visited it. An old stone wall was pointed out to us as frequented by Stormy Petrels, which place their nests, like Wheatears almost, in the interstices of the stones; but we were not fortunate enough to find what would have been to us one of these interesting nests. Partridges thrive very well on Skomer, and in the season good bags are made. The island possesses an immunity from rats. Mice are abundant, and are looked after by numerous White Owls, which have their habitations among the rocks.

While gazing on the myriads of sea-birds, we could not help thinking what an enormous quantity of fish there must be in the adjacent waters to maintain them, and what immense numbers the birds must capture. When the young Puffins are hatched, the old birds may be seen returning from fishing to their burrows, with little fish hanging like ribbons, two or three on either side of their beaks. These little fish are presumably young herrings. But no doubt there are enough fish in the green depths for all the birds, for all the seals, for all the larger predaceous fish, and for all the fishermen who go after them, and plenty over when the wants of all these are appeased to the full. Seals are not scarce round Skomer, and inhabit the caves at the base of the cliffs. We were favoured by the sight of one. As we sat among the sea-pinks (what singular cushions these plants form!), on the side of the island looking down on one of the havens, the seal was immediately beneath, and in the clear water his movements were perfectly visible. Every now and then he would lift his head just above the surface, and gaze up at us in a lazy indifferent manner, and then we could see him sink again and slowly paddling beneath the water, among the masses of many-coloured sea-weed. An ordinary sight this to dwellers upon the island, but to landmen like ourselves, the apparition of the seal appeared something to be preserved among the pleasant pictures stored away in the gallery of memory.

The experiment has been tried on Skomer of removing the eggs from the Gulls' nests and substituting hens' eggs, which have been invariably hatched out, and the chickens then

removed to the farm-yard. Even a pair of Carrion Crows were successfully entrusted with a quota of hen's eggs, and this, which might well seem a risky venture, resulted in the due appearance of the chickens and their safe removal home. The fact that one of them was black, although the eggs were the produce of fowls in which that colour was not represented, was of course regarded by the farm people as due to the influence of the Crows.

I must not omit to state that there are no Common Terns upon Skomer, as I erroneously asserted in my paper on the Birds of Pembrokeshire (p. 218); but a small colony of about twenty pairs, as I learned from the boatman who brought us across, inhabit Skokholm Stack, a large rock off the eastern end of Skokholm Island, some four or five miles distant from Skomer, and this would appear to be the only breeding-station of these birds in Pembrokeshire waters.

Skomer, like Lundy and Ramsey, is without either bush or tree, and does not appear to be dowered with the same wealth of wild flowers that one finds on those two islands. The white lychnis, and the beautiful wild roses of Ramsey were absent from Skomer. But as one walks round its cliffs there are some grand effects of colour. At one place the rocks are coal-black; this is at their base, and where they contrast with the green sea-water and sea-weeds of varied hues; higher up there are larger masses of deep orange-colour, while intermingled are rocks of brown and grey of different shades.

EGGING ON THE COAST OF YORKSHIRE.

BY THOMAS CARTER.

THE night we arrived at Filey (June 13th) we met on the cliff-top, past the old church, two men returning from a day's "climming," as it is there called; they had eggs of the Guillemot, Herring Gull, and Lesser Black-backed Gull, though very few of the last named. After making arrangements to accompany them on the next occasion, we enquired the best place on the Flamborough cliffs to see some "climming," and were told Bempton.

Accordingly, on the 16th, my brother and I proceeded there. Arrived at the cliff-top we found a strong north-east wind blowing,

bringing with it a strong fishy smell from the birds below, numbers of which were flying about in an agitated manner. Two men seated on the edge of the cliff were hauling in a rope in capital time, and as we reached them their comrade's head appeared from below, and the next moment he walked up to where we stood. He proved to be the head man of this set of four, and had brought up about thirty eggs, all Guillemots' or Ringed Guillemots'. This he considered a fair number for the time of year, the season being so far advanced. He wore two broad-brimmed felt hats padded with tow, for the chief danger arising from the fall of loose stones, it is necessary to have some protection. As he goes down he takes care to clear away with his feet any stones which look likely to become detached; it is, however, impossible to free the face of the cliff from all loose pieces, and if he sees a fragment falling he dodges it, if possible, by swinging out of the perpendicular. He had been so far fortunate as never to have met with any serious accident during the whole period of his climbing (thirty-six years), though he had occasionally been struck by falling stones, but never much hurt.

The ropes used are two in number, made of finest Russian hemp, and every third year a fresh pair, costing about £2, is carefully selected. The "climber" first puts on the "breeches," which are about three inches deep and made up of stout sacking. The legs are thrust through the two loops, which are pulled up to the fork of the body, and two belts attached to the breeches are crossed over the body and buckled on the chest. Two canvass bags, each capable of holding a great number of eggs, are slung one over each shoulder, for if an egg be picked up on the right side it is difficult to put it in a bag on the left side, and *vice versa*; hence two bags are necessary. A strong leather shield is strapped over the left wrist, and the "climber" is ready for work. One of the ropes is then fastened to two small loops on the front of the breeches, and passing over the left wrist (where the leather guard is strapped to prevent chafing), is held by the men on the cliff-top. An iron spike, about eighteen inches in length, with a flat top the size of a crown-piece, is then driven into the ground near the edge of the cliff, one end of the other rope is made fast round it, and the whole length of the rope thrown over the cliff, the birds flying out by hundreds from below as it falls.

The "climber" now stands astride of this fixed rope, which is called the "hand-rope," and grasping it in his hands, leans well back and walks backwards over the cliff, sticking his toes against any projections which appear. His companions, who have seated themselves behind one another on the cliff-top, with the "guide-rope" (the one fixed to his breeches) carefully coiled beside them, paying it out as he goes down. The one nearest the edge wears a broad leather band round his body to prevent the friction of the guide-rope (which runs round his body and through his hands) becoming painful.

A bank of earth from two to four feet in height is thrown up near the cliff, to prevent cattle straying over. Beyond this is a footpath, and between this path and the extreme edge of the cliff is a steep grassy slope, like a house-roof, so that it is impossible to lie down and look over, and care has to be taken not to shoot off. While the "climber" is being lowered the rope is allowed to run out along this slope, the friction retarding too rapid a descent, and thus helping the men at the top. When the man below has gathered as many eggs as he can reach, he jerks once upon the rope fastened to him, and as the other end is held by his companions they feel it at once, and draw him up, he all the time aiding himself with hands and feet in mounting upwards. The signalling is done by jerking the rope; thus one jerk means "pull up," three "more hand-rope," &c.

As the "climber" went down we walked to where the cliff jutted out a little, and as he was in a curve of the cliff we had a good view of his proceedings. This is the only way by which a proper view can be obtained. Down he went at a fair speed, every now and then striking his feet against the face of the cliff, and in his rebound gliding down the hand-rope a considerable distance. Proceeding lower still, he grew rapidly less to sight until he was perhaps two hundred feet down, when he stopped, and began to pick (to us) invisible objects from the ledges and put them in his bag; with an opera-glass we could see they were eggs, the birds—which seemed mere specks—flying round him in hundreds, the sea below being dotted with their numbers. Now and again a bird would rise as high as the top of the cliff, and skim past us, twisting its head about in an anxious manner. The Guillemots, by far the most numerous species, kept crying in a harsh croaking voice, "or—r—r"; the Ringed Guillemots and

Razorbills have a similar note, while the Kittiwakes reiterate their own name.

Now the "climber" has got so low down that the sea-spray wets his clothes, and as the only eggs to be found so low down are Kittiwakes' and not much in request, being small and easily broken, he stands on a ledge and jerks once on the guide-rope. One of his comrades goes to the edge of the cliff, holding by the hand-rope, and sticks an iron pulley on a short spike into the ground, passing the guide-rope on to it. The weight of the man on the rope keeps the pulley fast, and thus they haul him steadily but rapidly up. He empties the contents of his bags into large baskets, and we find the eggs are almost all Guillemots', with a sprinkling of Ringed Guillemots', which can only be told by watching the birds off the eggs, though the men profess to be able to distinguish them by their being shorter and rounder; but some eggs from which the men watched the birds for me, and brought up, were exactly similar to those of the Guillemot. The colours are most brilliant and varied, and a basketful is a beautiful object.

Next to the Guillemots, Razorbills are the most abundant species; but the eggs of these birds are generally difficult to reach, being, as a rule, placed in a deep fissure. Then come Kittiwakes, which make their nests just above reach of high tide. Puffins are very numerous, but as their eggs are almost invariably placed at the end of a deep crevice or hole, they are not often seen in the "climber's" baskets. Rock Pigeons build in some numbers in the caves below, but from their inaccessibility their eggs are seldom taken. Jackdaws build in the nooks and crannies of the rocks, but the eggs are too small to be worth the trouble of looking after. Occasionally the nest of a Kestrel or Carrion Crow is met with, and twice only in his life had our informant taken a Cormorant's nest. Ravens have been extinct for the past fifteen years. The birds are known by the following local names:—the Common Guillemot is called the "Scout" (pronounced "Scoot"); the Ringed Guillemot, "Silver-eyed Scout"; the Razorbill, "Auk"; the Puffin, "Parrot"; the Carrion Crow, "Raven Crow"; the Kittiwake, "Kittiake."

The next time the "climber" went below he brought up a live Razorbill which he had caught on her egg; she was in a very bad temper, and bit savagely at his fingers. When he let her fly

she had some difficulty in getting below again, for the wind struck upwards from the cliff as it blew in from the sea. These birds are often blown inland in stormy weather, and never get back again, seeming to get quite bewildered.

£1 reward is offered for information given for every bird killed or taken during the close season; hence a sharp look out is kept for any offenders against the law. We were glad to hear that the birds have been increasing in numbers every year since the Act was passed, and we were told that if the passing of the Act had been delayed a few more years there would have been no birds left.

On asking whether they would let us try to bring up some eggs, they said "Yes, if we dared." Accordingly we arranged to go next day, and they would find an easy place or two where the cliff was not hollow. After going down a few more places they left off for that day, as one of the set was absent, and it was hard work for only two to keep pulling up the third all day. They take it in turns to go down, one man climbing one day and next day another, and all the eggs are divided equally among them. They sell most of them for eating among the villagers and farmers, but pick out some of the best-marked specimens to sell to visitors at neighbouring watering-places, and sometimes to an egg dealer. They have their regular places where they always go down, and each place is visited twice a week, so that the eggs cannot get incubated. The different sets of climbers along the cliffs have each their own ground, and do not trespass on one another's territory. The farmers along whose fields they climb receive a basketful or so of eggs as rent. The men are ordinary working men, perhaps renting a field or two, and climb from about the middle of April or beginning of May till the first week in July, though they cannot climb when the weather is very wild or wet.

On arriving the next day at the cliff-top, I found the men at work nearer Speeton, on Raincliff, where the cliffs are about four hundred feet in height; the highest point is at Speeton, four hundred and fifty feet. They were just at the place where they had decided to let me down, so taking off my hat, coat and watch I donned the breeches, bags and gauntlet, and grasping the hand-rope, proceeded to walk backwards off the edge. I should imagine it is the first turning over the edge that tries the nerves of the amateur most. I felt an inclination to kneel on the edge instead

of leaning as far back as possible with my feet against the face of the cliff. However, I did not give way to this, but went steadily over and down, the men paying out the guide-rope. As soon as I was fairly over I looked straight down into the sea boiling below, and cannot say that I felt the least giddiness; on the contrary, I enjoyed the sensation very much. I was soon low enough to see two Guillemot's eggs on a ledge, and speedily bagged them, but on looking round could not see any more. I expect the men had cleared off all but these two, so that in case I did not put in my appearance no great loss would result to them. Giving the signal to pull up, I was soon at the top again, and was critically looked at by the men, who, seeing that I did not tremble, said I was "a good-plucked one."

They do not seem to care much about lowering amateurs, probably because it takes up too much of their time. The birds were very numerous here, and I was taken on to one projection and pointed out the slack on one side of it, where the birds were simply clinging in thousands to the face of the cliff, like bees. We shouted and waved our hands to try and frighten some of them off, but their screams drowned our voices, so that very few, comparatively, flew away. Almost all that left had been sitting on an egg, and very beautiful these looked against the white cliff. These birds were almost all Guillemots, and the reason for the vast colony at this point is that the cliff hangs over many yards at the top, so that it is quite impossible to swing far enough under to reach the eggs. The birds seem to know this, and breed in security.

The cliffs are of white limestone; down below are curious fissures, in which the "climbers" sometimes disappear from sight, and at the bottom are fine caves and arches. The Guillemots and Razorbills, as a rule, sit with their backs to the sea; they seem to be unable to fly directly up to their ledges, and approach them by a circuitous sideways route. Here and there a cluster of five or six Razorbills may be seen facing the sea, and as another bird flies past they stretch out their necks and hiss and snap at it. The little Puffins seem to take a delight in sitting in the mouths of the holes where their eggs are, and surveying the animated scene. The men told me that at one time a black variety of the Common Guillemot, and at another time a white Guillemot, haunted the cliffs, but were never killed to their knowledge. The

eggs are much liked by the villagers, who say they are never made bilious by eating them.

The next day my father, brother, and self set out again for the cliffs, and found the men climbing at "Danes Dyke," nearer to Flamborough. The birds were not so numerous there, with the exception of Puffins; but these birds were more abundant, probably, because a colony of rabbits also found quarters there, the Puffins doubtless finding the burrows made very convenient for nesting in. The rabbits ran about and disappeared over the edge of the cliff in a miraculous fashion.

As this was the last time we expected to visit these cliffs, I again donned the climbing apparatus, and was lowered a great distance, until I gathered two eggs of the Ringed Guillemot and one of the Common Guillemot, which were all I could see, one of the men having been over this part of the cliff earlier in the day. Taking a last survey of the wondrous surroundings from my airy position, I gave the signal, and was soon on the cliff-top again.

The eggs when fresh gathered are of the most brilliant and varied colours, and we were able to choose a splendid series from those we saw brought up. Those with a green or blue ground colour, with black markings, are most abundant; then those with white ground and black marks; and lastly, those with white ground and reddish brown and lilac markings. Two we saw brought up were of a uniform pale green colour, without any markings. The story that a Guillemot's egg will spin round with the wind must be a myth. The men said they had never seen anything of the kind, and when I was down I should imagine there was quite sufficient wind to turn them round if they would go. The greatest number of eggs we saw brought up at one time was forty-nine, but in the height of the season they sometimes get upwards of one hundred—no light weight to bring up.

We arranged that night with the Filey men, before mentioned, to climb the cliffs between the Brigg and Scarborough, and started early the following morning (June 19th). We commenced climbing soon after we passed the Spa, but one of the men and I went down several times without finding anything, until he brought up three eggs from a Herring Gull's nest. The cliffs are not so high as the Flamborough range, but much worse to climb, often overhanging very much, and composed of soft material which readily crumbles. We climbed as far as a part of the cliff jutting out

called "Scout Nab," as a small colony of these birds lay there, but we found only a few Herring Gulls' eggs, and some Rock Pigeons' nests, from which I was unable to extract the eggs, as they were so far in the crevices. We only saw one Guillemot's egg here, for the rest had all been taken by a climber from Filey a day or two previously. A Sheldrake flew quacking below us, and doubtless had a nest or young near. My fellow-climber said he had never found a nest. He said there had been a Teal with a brood of young on the Brigg that morning.

Past "Scout Nab" we found nothing until we came to a part of the cliff called the "Lime-kiln," and here we could see three Herring Gulls' nests, containing respectively three, two, and one egg. I again donned the ropes and went down. It was an awkward place, the cliff overhanging a considerable distance. When this is the case the best plan is to turn your back to the cliff at once and slide down the rope, as in this position you do not spin round and twist your ropes. I brought up three of the eggs in safety, not caring to take any more. A Rock Pigeon flying out, further on, I again went down, and saw the nest was in a deep fissure. Creeping up it as far as I could, with my walking-stick held out at arm's length, I succeeded with much difficulty in raking out the two eggs, but cracked them both in doing so; they were quite fresh, and I managed to blow them on reaching our lodgings, whither we then turned our steps, as it was late in the afternoon.

Several times in the course of the next few days when on the Brigg, we observed some Cormorants fly into a bend in the cliffs past the Spa; so we went along the top of the cliff, and saw one of the birds on a projecting point, while two more flew out from below it. Feeling sure there must be a nest there, we went with one of the men on June 26th, but though he and I went down several times we could see no traces of a nest, though the cliff had a quantity of the droppings splashed about where we had seen the Cormorant perched.

We then went to a recess between the Spa and the Brigg, from whence we had often seen a Rock Pigeon leave its nest. Our companion held the rope above, and after throwing both ends down, I climbed below, and tying the guide-rope round my chest, gave the signal and climbed up the rope—for the cliff was hollow and overhung some yards—until opposite the crevice where the

nest was. By swinging in, I was at length able to catch my foot on a projecting cornice of rock, and then my brother, who stood below to shout directions to the man above, told him to slack the rope. I was thus able to get a hold of the rock with my hands. Then, as he continued to slack the rope, I crawled further under the cliff along a ledge which led to the nest, and at length was able to reach the eggs, which fortunately were only a hand's length in the hole. Pocketing these, I crawled back as far as possible, and then, swinging away from the cliff, slid down to the ground. Our companion was delighted when he saw the eggs, as he said "climbers" considered Rock Pigeons' eggs the most difficult to get. I may mention that we several times saw tame Pigeons flying about the cliffs in company with the genuine Blue-rocks. When climbing on these cliffs we did not use "breeches," but merely tied the rope under our arms. The "breeches" are certainly more comfortable, as the rope then does not chafe.

On June 27th, as we still observed the Cormorants visiting the same part of the cliffs, we hired a boat and rowed out round the Brigg, opposite the Point. We had not been there long before a Cormorant flew up and alighted on a ledge, where it sat watching us and preening its feathers; but though we waited an hour it would not show us its nest, and at length flew away. While we were watching two other Cormorants flew past us and disappeared behind the cliffs jutting out at Gristhorpe Bay. Next morning we went across country to this bay, where we commenced climbing, but could see no traces of Cormorants or their nests. A pair of Kestrels screaming round told us they had a nest near. One of the men then descended, and we saw him thrust his arms into a fissure, below which we had remarked a quantity of droppings. Then ensued a tremendous screaming and chattering from within. Out fluttered a young hawk to the foot of the cliff, and immediately after our man pulled out by the legs five young Kestrels, screaming, fighting and clawing one another vindictively. He said they were all standing in a row in a crevice of the cliff, with no sign of a nest.

We then climbed towards Scout Nab, but with very poor success, finding only a few Herring Gull's nests. These were full of dry grass and roots, and placed on ledges of the cliff, especially where a little grass is growing, and are often in places most difficult of access, doubtless from the incessant persecution to

which they are subjected by the "climbers" from Filey, parties of whom are constantly visiting them; but in spite of this we were told that these birds are not decreasing in numbers. They make a tremendous outcry when their nests are approached, hovering so close as to show the sparkling of their eyes, and all the time screaming vociferously. We did not take any of their eggs, for we had a sufficient number; and one of the men and I kept climbing at intervals, in the hope of finding a Cormorant's nest, but in vain. We only found two Jackdaws' nests with eggs, and one Guillemot's egg, which, being a nicely marked specimen, I secured after some difficulty. We also found two plump young Herring Gulls, as large as pullets, walking briskly along a ledge half way down the cliff. We saw but a single pair of Lesser Black-backed Gulls during the three days we were on these cliffs.

From the number of times we saw Cormorants turn in past the Spa, I feel sure there were one or two nests there. A large fissure ran into the cliff in a slanting direction, but as the cliff hung over very much it was quite inaccessible, and my opinion is the nests were in there. Had there been any nests on the face of the cliff we should have seen them. A man who had been climbing that week assured us that a Cormorant had flown from this very fissure, nearly striking him as it hurried out, but that he could not possibly climb into it. All whom we asked said Cormorants' eggs had never been taken there; but one climber said he once saw a nest with three eggs on Scout Nab, but in an unapproachable position. He said that Ravens had not built, or been seen, on these cliffs for upwards of twenty years, though formerly they bred there regularly; and that one year he took some large-sized eggs, of a pale green ground colour, with red blotches from the cliffs near the Spa, and that remains of many birds, &c., were scattered about near, from which we judged them eggs of a hawk. He sold them to a dealer in Filey, but on making enquiries we found they had been again sold, though not identified.

On July 3rd we visited Flamborough Caves, and found the birds there were mostly Puffins, with a few Guillemots. On the sloping banks on the shore between Filey and Speeton we found nests of the Titlark, Linnet, Sedge Warbler, Sand Martin, Whinchat, and Hedgesparrow in abundance. We also noted Grasshopper Warblers and Stonechats, and found a Wheatear's nest with young between Filey and the Brigg. House Martins had

nests on all the cliffs, and here and there a pair of Swifts flew about, evidently having their nests in some crevices. Corn Buntings and Skylarks were most abundant inland, and on several occasions we saw two or three Ringed Plovers feeding on the Brigg.

ON SOME INTRODUCED BIRDS IN NEW ZEALAND.

By T. H. POTTS, F.L.S.

SOME particulars about introduced birds seem worth recording, such as the remarkable rate of reproduction in some species, the retrogression—without apparent cause—that may be noticed amongst others.

The Hedgesparrow, *Accentor modularis*, is plentiful in the gardens and hedgerows about Christchurch and its suburbs; it finds such capital shelter in the thick gorse hedges. On Banks' Peninsula it is rarely met with.

The Song Thrush, *Turdus musicus*, may be found at Riccarton, near Christchurch, but in most other places it is a rare bird. There were several nests in the gardens at Ohinitahi eighteen years ago, but a cock bird that made its appearance in the summer of 1882-3 was looked upon as a rarity.

It has been hitherto unexplained why this species should die out, when its congener, the Blackbird, *Turdus merula*, is so prolific, increasing in numbers wherever there is cultivation or covert to skulk in. About Christchurch it breeds in far too great numbers for the contentment of owners of gardens and orchards, for it attacks most kinds of fruit. Notwithstanding the gun, the trap, and even poison, the Blackbird flourishes. I have known more than one hundred and fifty killed in one strawberry garden in about three months.

Of the Australian Magpie, *Gymnorhinus*, the numbers have decreased almost everywhere. Probably many are destroyed during the breeding season, for at that time its attacks on persons are so savage and persistent that it tries peoples' patience too much for its welfare. Native birds have increased since the Magpies have left this district.

The Rook, *Corvus frugilegus*, thrives in the suburbs of Christchurch; it breeds on the taller blue-gums (*Eucalyptus*). The

cawing and wheeling of large flocks reminds one of the rural delights of the old country.

The Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*, has greatly increased in numbers. Large flocks settle in the sheep-paddocks, where they do good service. In the autumn the Starling affects the taller trees about the plantations.

The Chaffinch, *Fringilla cœlebs*, once was common here; during the past two years it has sensibly decreased. In nest-building it very frequently uses fragments of printed paper as a substitute for lichens where this favourite material is scarce.

The Goldfinch, *Fringilla carduelis*, is now one of the commonest species here. It breeds in our gardens freely, and is sometimes seen with Sparrows searching for food on newly-dug ground.

The Greenfinch, *Fringilla chloris*, was once one of the worst pests of the corn-fields and fruit-gardens. One of its favourite habits in the winter months consisted in picking out seeds from the large cones of the cluster pine (*P. pinaster*).

The Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*, has become a terrible nuisance to the farmer. At a recent meeting at the rooms of the Agricultural and Pastoral Association the damage from Sparrows was estimated to have entailed a loss of £50,000 to the Canterbury farmers. Very energetic measures have to be taken for lessening its numbers. Sparrow Clubs have started in all directions, and tens of thousands of eggs and young birds are annually brought in for the rewards offered for them. The Sparrow is gregarious in its breeding habits in some instances.

The Yellow Bunting, *Emberiza citrinella*, is not very often seen here. It has been introduced twenty years, but its numbers in this part of the country are not large.

The Skylark, *Alauda arvensis*, has increased in an astonishing manner. As it annoys farmers by eating off many varieties of young plants, great numbers are destroyed annually. I knew the English South Downs well very many years ago, but neither there nor in any other district of England have I heard at one time so many Skylarks aloft, pouring forth their melody, as in some parts of this colony—notably in Nelson and on the Canterbury plains. There seems to be gradually taking place some change in their habits, influenced doubtless by the altered conditions of life in this country; although gregarious I have never noticed them packing together in vast flocks. Migration

from one district to another is doubtful, except perhaps from the higher western lands during winter. In the "back country" to the west the winter season is severe and well marked, but over a great part of the colony the weather during that portion of the year is open enough to allow them ample scope for getting their living. In this district it remains with us all the year round. In the old country I never observed the Skylark in full song when perched. This habit is not very infrequent here; I have noticed it in Nelson, Akavoa, and in some places on Banks' Peninsula. Taking up a position on a post or rail, gently turning from side to side, now and then with a slight movement of the wings, it indulges in song as joyous and powerful as when ascending in spiral circles skyward. At Summer it has been observed singing whilst on the ground. Perhaps this may be the beginning of a gradual development of a newly acquired habit. It does not shun trees so much as in England. After favourite plants it will freely enter gardens or orchards. I have seen one perch on a dwarf kouhai tree (*Sophora tetraptera*, Aiton) by the roadside, near the Maori pah at Raupaki. One may observe considerable variety in the coloration of the eggs: whitish or grey-yellow, profusely speckled with brown of various shades; dull greyish with a green tinge, freckled or mottled with ashen brown; rich brown, abundantly marked with darker shades, highly varnished. A nest from the Ashburton district contained eggs of pale dull pink, profusely speckled with reddish brown; these beautiful specimens differ from any I have seen. Usually there are three in a nest.

Ohinitahi, N. Z., July 9, 1884.

NOTES ON THE ORNITHOLOGY OF NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

BY THE RT. HON. LORD LILFORD, F.L.S.

SHORTLY after sending my last communication, dated Nov. 15th, 1883 to 'The Zoologist' (Zool. 1883, p. 502), I was laid low by a severe attack of rheumatic gout, which kept me a close prisoner to the house, and often to my bed, till the first week of June, 1884; so that the following notes are, with few exceptions, given on the authority of others.

The Common Buzzard hinted at in the notes to which I have

just referred, was not a myth, but distinctly seen and described to me by several persons, till Nov. 22nd. A Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*, was seen at Achurch on Nov. 14th.

Two birds seen by the Hon. Thomas Fitzwilliam, an experienced snipe-shooter, on Nov. 16th, were reported by him to us as undoubtedly specimens of the Great or Solitary Snipe, *Scolopax major*. Mr. Fitzwilliam was out with his hounds, and flushed these birds close to him, from a field of newly-sown wheat near Barnwell. This is a very late appearance for this species in this neighbourhood, in which it is at all seasons an uncommon bird.

A Short-eared Owl, *Strix brachyotus*, was shot and brought to us on Dec. 1st. Eight Wild Geese, *Anser* sp.?, reported to us as passing southwards on Dec. 2nd. A Green Sandpiper, *Totanus ochropus*, was shot by Mr. George Hunt on our land near Clapton on Dec. 4th. An adult female Peregrine Falcon reported to us on Dec. 5th, by Mr. Hunt and one of our gamekeepers, as haunting the river very near this house. I only record this for the reason that both my informants were struck by the large size and "blueness" of this individual. A Dunlin, *Tringa alpina*, shot "up the river," and brought to us, on Dec. 7th, by one of our gamekeepers. On the same day Mr. Hunt bagged thirteen Snipes, *Scolopax gallinago*, two Jack Snipes, *S. gallinula*, six Wild Ducks, *Anas boschas*, three Teal, *A. crecca*, and an immature Common Gull, *Larus canus*, on our property between this house and Thrapston.

On Dec. 12th, an Oystercatcher, *Hematopus ostralegus*, was knocked down by a "large hawk" near Clapton, and shot by the gamekeeper to Mr. Freeman; this specimen was very kindly presented to us by the Rev. E. Freeman, of Clapton Rectory.

On Jan. 29th, 1884, we received, for identification, a stuffed specimen of a young Puffin, *Fratercula arctica*, which was caught alive at a cottage-door near Naseby Reservoir on the evening of Dec. 12th, and reported to us, and recorded in local publications, as a Little Auk, *Mergulus alle*. With reference to these last two occurrences, I may mention that I find Dec. 12th, 1883, recorded in my journal as "a wild stormy day, after a fierce gale and heavy rain during the previous night."

On Jan. 30th a very large and fine Bittern, *Botaurus stellaris*, was brought to us, in the flesh, by Mr. S. Deacon, of Polebrook, from whom we learned that the bird had been shot by a gamekeeper near Ashton, on the river below Oundle.

Early in February Dr. Tomlinson, of Oundle, reported to us having several times seen a Blackbird, *Turdus merula*, var., of a light golden sandy colour, at a certain spot on the road between Oundle and Lilford cross-roads, not a mile from this house.

On March 1st authentic reports reached me of Wild Ducks beginning to sit on full complements of eggs near the house. On the 18th the Rev. F. M. Stopford reported a nest of Wood Pigeons, *Columba palumbus*, containing two eggs, in the garden of his rectory at Tichmarsh. On the 19th a pair of Stock Doves, *Columba ænas*, were busy at nesting in a thick Pinsapo pine tree immediately in front of the house and my bed-room windows.

On March 26th one of our gamekeepers brought me a Tawny Owl, *Strix aluco*, alive, with an egg, one of four upon which the bird sat without moving till the hollow tree in which the nest was situated was felled and about to be sawn up. The woodmen had been at work at the tree all the previous day, unconscious of the Owl's establishment therein, and she remained on the *débris* of her productions till caught. We let her go out of window about half an hour after receiving her, and were glad to see her sail off in the direction of her ruined home, uninjured, but hotly pursued by "Sankey," a tame Spanish Raven, *Corvus corax*, taken from the nest near Santander by us in 1876, who has, and takes every every advantage of, complete liberty of action.

On March 27th we received from the Rev. W. Finch Hatton an escaped Silver Pheasant, *Euplocamus nycthemerus*, female, which had been caught a few days previously on the high road road near Deene, and remained unclaimed.

On April 2nd Mr. Hunt reported large flights of Fieldfares, *Turdus pilaris*, and Redwings, *T. iliacus*, going northwards on March 29th, and Wood Pigeons still in large flocks about the open fields, though many of this species are now sitting. I imagine that these flocks consist principally of our autumnal immigrants on their return journey, and that those employed in domestic duties are our home-bred birds.

On April 5th my son put a Wild Duck from her nest full of eggs, on a broken elm at some fifteen feet from the ground; and reported that on enquiring from one of the gamekeepers about the "golden" Blackbird above mentioned he found that the bird was well known to, and had been repeatedly seen by, that individual, who took him to the spot previously alluded to, and soon

showed him the bird, which my son described as being of the colour of an Australian sovereign.

On April 6th three Woodcocks, *Scolopax rusticola*, were observed "glading" in Souther Wood. On the 8th Wild Ducks were beginning to hatch. On the 11th fresh remains of Woodcock were found by Mr. Hunt in Little Wadenhoe Wood. On the 15th Woodcock seen at dusk near Souther Wood, and again on the 17th. On the 19th, vast numbers of Wood Pigeons in flocks near Thurning. On the 20th four Swans, *Cygnus* sp. ?, were seen by several persons about and near the park here on wing.

On April 21st one of our gamekeepers assured me that he had seen a large female Sparrowhawk, *Accipiter nisus*, in December last, make several fierce dashes at a rabbit running on some bare "spring" wood. We think that we shall be borne out by falconers in stating that the above is a very uncommon occurrence; but it is not the first to the same effect that has reached us, and in this instance we have every reason to believe in the complete accuracy of our informant.

On April 24th another Wild Ducks's nest with eggs was reported as discovered on a broken elm-bough, in our park here, at some fourteen feet from the ground. Woodcock seen in Souther Wood on the 22nd.

Spring migrants reported to us in the following order:—

- March 9. Whinchat, *Pratincola rubetra*.
- „ 22. Wheatear, *Saxicola ænanthe*.
- „ 27. Chiffchaff, *Phylloscopus minor*.
- April 1. Redstart, *Ruticilla phænicura*.
- „ 7. Wryneck, *Yunc torquilla*.
- „ 11. Ring Ouzel, *Turdus torquatus*; Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus*.
- „ 12. Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*.
- „ 13. Willow Wren, *Phylloscopus trochilus*; Blackcap, *Sylvia atricapilla*.
- „ 16. Sand Martin, *Cotyle riparia*.
- „ 23. Yellow Wagtail, *Motacilla rayi*.
- „ 30. House Martin, *Hirundo urbica*.
- May 2. Common Sandpiper, *Totanus hypoleucus*.
- „ 3. Whitethroat, *Curruca cinerea*.
- „ 4. Landrail, *Crex pratensis*; Swift, *Cypselus apus*; Spotted Flycatcher, *Muscicapa grisola*.
- „ 8. Hobby, *Falco subbuteo*.
- „ 12. Turtle Dove, *Turtur communis*.

I left home on June 3rd, and did not return till August 20th, and as Mr. Hunt, my neighbour and chief purveyor of ornithological news, left Wadenhoe shortly after the first-mentioned date, I have very little to record during June, July, and the early part of August.

On June 10th we received information of the finding of three eggs of the Hobby, *Falco subbuteo*, at some twelve miles from this house, in a nest in an oak tree, from which a pair of Carrion Crows, *Corvus corone*, had been killed and their produce destroyed about a month previously (letter dated June 7th).

Mr. Hunt, on June 15th, found a nest of the Red-backed Shrike, *Lanius collurio*, containing three eggs, in his garden at Wadenhoe. This occurrence is one of purely local interest, as the Butcher-bird has only of late years bred in this neighbourhood, and the present is but the second instance of the finding of its nest in this district that has come to my knowledge.

On July 8th I heard of young Hobbies in a Carrion Crow's nest, in the same tree from which I received two of these little falcons last year (see Zool. 1883, p. 427). On July 10th three young Hobbies, from the nest mentioned June 10th, were brought to Lilford. The second nest (July 8th, *suprà*), said to have been destroyed by "crows"—a statement about which I am, with good reason, extremely sceptical.

On August 22nd one of our gamekeepers assured us that on the previous day he saw five Partridges, *Perdix cinerea*, sitting upon the top rail and posts of a five-barred gate near this house. On the 23rd we saw a large raptorial bird at no great distance from us, which I believe to have been a Honey Buzzard, *Pernis apivorus*. On the 25th three Whimbrels, *Numenius phaeopus*, flew past my windows in a S.W. direction, "tittering" loudly, about 6 a.m.

On August 27th a "white Swallow," *Hirundo rustica*, var., was reported by one of our gamekeepers as seen and watched for some time near Aldwinchle. My informant is quite certain as to species, as distinct from Martin, *Hirundo urbica*, and saw the bird again in the same district on the 29th. My sister-in-law and our coachman also reported a "white Swallow" as seen by them whilst driving near Clapton on Sept. 6th; but neither informant in this latter case knows a Swallow from a House Martin.

On Sept. 1st a flight of some twenty or thirty Whimbrels passed high overhead, going S.W., as we were shooting near Pilton. On this day Mr. Wirley P. Birch, of Cranford, near Kettering, kindly brought to me alive a Shag, *Phalacrocorax graculus*, which his son had "fetched down" a few days previously, as it was passing high in air near the last-named village. The bird is very little injured and doing well, on a little pond in our garden, in company with a Black-footed Penguin, *Spheniscus demersus*. I consider this Shag to be a bird of last year's hatch.

On Sept. 4th four Snipes (two of which were, as we are assured by the gamekeeper who saw them, "Jacks"!) were noticed at a pond near Thrapston. We do not feel quite assured as to correct specific identification in this instance, but ourselves saw a Jack Snipe on Sept. 11th.

On Sept. 7th Dr. Tomlinson assured me he had seen that morning some young Swallows in their nest in his cowshed at Oundle.

Sept. 13th. Mr. Wm. Seale,—the London birdcatcher mentioned in my last communication (Zool. 1883, p. 502),—who has been here for some days past, has seen several Redpolls, *Linota rufescens*, and taken four of them. He reports a Ring Ouzle near this house about the 11th, and a long string of large Gulls, probably *Larus argentatus*, going southwards on that day.

Lilford Hall, Oundle, Sept. 14, 1884.

THE FINWHALE FISHERY ON THE COAST OF FINMARK.

BY ALFRED HENEAGE COCKS, M.A., F.Z.S.

(Concluded from p. 424).

Dr. Guldberg, speaking of the Humpback ('Vardö Posten,' Aug. 12th, 1883), says:—"The colour is above more or less coal-black; on the sides and under the belly whitish, or with white flecks and black rings upon white ground, which give it in many places a marbled appearance. The pectoral fins are marked upon the distal two-thirds with black rings. The proximal third is black. The baleen-plates, of which the longest is 2 ft., are grey-black, with yellowish hair. Its food consists of Capelan

(*Mallotus arcticus*), and other small fish, also of "kril" (*Thysanopoda inermis*), and other small Crustacea. With regard to its propagation, I have not chanced to come to any certain knowledge about it, either as to how long its period of gestation is, or whether it has any fixed pairing season. I have only had the opportunity of examining two fœtuses. Such fœtuses are considered of the greatest rarity. Both were of small size, from 1 to 1½ ft. in length, and were taken in the middle of summer,—in the month of July,—which should augur that the pairing season falls in one of the spring months."

Common Rorqual (*Balænoptera musculus*, L.) — Norwegian names, Fin Hval, Rörhval.* Specimens seen, a male about 40 ft. or rather more, brought in Aug. 24th; one passed at sea, being towed by a whaler on Aug. 21st, about 60 ft. long; and a fœtus between 9 and 10 ft. long, in too bad a state to be worth preserving, probably obtained about the end of July or beginning of August. Grey-blue or greyish slate-colour on the back; the whole under side white, including the under side of the flukes. The white is only a few inches in width along the small part—the last few feet of the tail-end.

The extremely thin, elongated, or seemingly emaciated appearance of this species is very noticeable; the posterior portion of the back is almost sharp-edged, quite deserving the English name, "Razor-back." The white on the under side includes all the furrows, except about the uppermost row. The front of the under jaw and the chin are also white, with black flecks. In the figure of this species in Mr. Southwell's 'Seals and Whales of the British Seas,' the nasal protuberance or ridge along the median line of the head appears to shelve away gradually to the sides, instead of being a mere narrow ridge standing up abruptly on the otherwise very shallow skull. This figure is after one in Professor Flower's paper on an example of this species (Proc. Zool. Soc. 1869, p. 604), where the nasal ridge is shown correctly. In Mr. Southwell's figure the under side is shown almost entirely dark, and the shape of the tail portion between the fin and the flukes is more like a Blue Whale than this species, which is smaller or shallower; and this point is also, I venture to think, incorrect in Prof. Flower's figure. This

* Dr. Guldberg, 'Vardö Posten,' Aug. 19th, 1883.

latter figure is merely an outline, no coloration being shown, as the specimen from which it was drawn, having been for some time exposed to the action of the sea, had entirely lost the outer cuticle. The baleen-plates are narrow, black on the outer edge, then slate-colour, gradually striping to yellow on the inner. The bristles are light yellow, almost buff.

I noted the following few particulars of the anatomy of the fœtus:—The intestine was distinctly divisible into large and small intestine; the former extended about three-quarters of an inch beyond the commencement of the latter—not enough to call a cœcum. The colon was about 4 ft. long. The kidneys are long ovals, almost pointed at the lower end, coarsely granulated, flattened, and much larger proportionately than the kidneys of any other order of Mammalia with which I am acquainted. The liver is divided into two lobes, each slightly smaller than, and much the shape of, the kidneys.

In the first of the three stomachs I found a small quantity of two species of *Algæ*, which I presume must have been forced there by the action of the tides since it had been lying on the beach. The heart was very broad; the ventricles were separated from each other on the inferior side by a well-marked depression running down the exact centre. The cavity of the thorax was much compressed. The diaphragm was very thick and muscular.

An idea prevails apparently amongst all, or at least a large majority of those connected with the whaling in Finmarken, that hybrids occur between the Common and Sibbald's Rorqual, and, without for one moment believing this to be the case, I have thought it well to refer to this belief, as showing, as I suppose, the variation in individuals of the common species. Captain F. describes these supposed hybrids as having the head of a Finner, the tail of a Blue Whale; bluer on the back than a Finner, and blue and white on the under side. Captain S. says the baleen is partly black, partly yellow; the flippers like a Finwhale's, but blue colour; the fin like a Finner's with the point cut off. Captain Bn. says he once killed one that was so fat it could not go fast! It had the narrow head, light-coloured baleen, and small flippers of a Finner; and had some white on the under side, but was on the whole darker than a regular Finwhale. Captain. Bg. describes them as most like Finners when caught, but like Blue Whales when the spœk is off. Captain Bn. also

told me that once, when eighty English miles from land, he saw a whale seventy-five to eighty feet long, the colour of the cheese well known to everyone who has been in Norway, called "Mæs Ost" (that is, a shade or two lighter colour than brown Windsor soap); it was with a Blue Whale, and had a small fin like that species. Captain S. also told me of whales which he called "Langrör" (Longreed), between fifty and sixty feet long, which are thinner than Finners; yellow nearly all over, and black on the under side. I think it will be allowed that all these appear like varieties of the common species, except perhaps the one described as like "Mæs Ost," which is as likely to have been a variety of the Blue Whale.

Dr. Guldberg ('Vardö Posten,' Aug. 19th, 1883) says of the Finner:—"Its length varies between sixty and seventy feet. The form of its body is rather slender, the greatest thickness lies behind the pectoral fins, and is most pronounced in old individuals. The pectorals are comparatively small, one-ninth to one-tenth of the length of the body, rather pointed and lancet-shaped. The back fin is small, with the point bent upwards and backwards, but arching forwards and curving inwards on the hinder side. The colour is above blackish, or else grey-black; underneath it is white, with a greyish band passing over it. Now and then, both in this and the following species, one meets with yellowish tinges, which originate from a peculiar colouring-matter; this likewise occurs among the older specimens. There is a variety of it, called 'Langrör' (Longreed), which is chiefly conspicuous from its length and slender build. The white colour under the throat reaches to the sides and on to the under jaw. The baleen-plates are short, the longest is scarcely 3 ft.; the colour is blue-grey or black-grey, with light stripes and yellow hair; they are likewise light on the sides, where the light colour extends up to the under jaw. The foremost baleen-plates are yellow and greyish white." ('Vardö Posten,' Aug. 26th).—"Its food consists partly of fish,—as, for instance, herring, small cod, and capelan; partly of small crustaceans, *e.g.*, shrimps. It is this whale which is called 'Loddehvalen' (Capelan Whale), when it is seen constantly pursuing the shoals of Capelan)."

Sibbald's Rorqual (*Balenoptera sibbaldii*, Gray).—Norwegian name, Blaa Hval = the Blue Whale. Besides parts of several skeletons and quantities of loose bones, and a specimen already

flensed, I only saw two examples of this species during my stay at Vardö, as it was too late in the season for them; and I was fortunate in finding an unusually late season, as in most years, arriving as late as I did (Aug. 21st), I should not have seen a single example. The dates of the arrival at the factories of these two specimens were August 22nd and 28th, having been killed about the 20th or 21st, and on the 26th. The blubber is thickest on the neck and shoulders (about 8 or 10 in. with the skin, in a specimen from fifty to sixty feet long), giving the animal a somewhat humpbacked appearance. Upper side dark slate-blue; under side a shade lighter; no white about the body, but the flippers are white on the under side, and are longer than those of a Finner. The baleen is coal-black, including the bristles, and is rather broader than the Common Rorqual's. The blow-holes are situated in a very deep depression. The colouring of this species generally, and the shape of the tail just in front of the caudal fin, much more nearly resemble the figure of the Common Rorqual in 'Seals and Whales of the British Seas,' before referred to, than does that species in these particulars. The Blue Whale is probably the first to leave the Finmarken coast at the end of summer, the Finner next, and the Humpback last; but there are not many days interval between them all.

In 'The Arctic Voyages of A. E. Nordenskiöld,' p. 52, the editor, Mr. Leslie (whether on his own authority or Nordenskiöld's is not stated), says—"It is probable that 'finners' never live in colder water than 2.5° C. ($= 36.14^{\circ}$ F.), and that the northern limit of their distribution coincides with sea of this temperature." It seems remarkable that on this voyage, while whales ceased on the outward passage in May, after lat. $75^{\circ} 45'$, they were seen again on the return passage in September as high as 78° .

During my voyage to Spitzbergen in the autumn of 1882 (Zool. 1883), we saw *Balenopteridæ* (all considered at the time as Blue Whales, though I now think some of the smaller individuals seen may have been Humpbacks) on the way north, on Sept. 1st, three or four specimens close to ice, in about lat. 75° ; temperature of the water 34.34° F. ($= 1.3^{\circ}$ C.); two on Sept. 3rd, in about lat. $75^{\circ} 28'$, water 32.9° F. ($= 0.5^{\circ}$ C.); and on our way south again we saw the first whale on Sept. 28th, in about lat. $75^{\circ} 22'$, and others later that same day (temperature of water was not taken).

Of the two whales passed in the cold water on Sept. 3rd, only the blowing of one was seen; the other was only about forty feet long, so they may have been Humpbacks. In my summer voyage to Spitzbergen in 1881 (Zool. 1882) I saw no whales as far to the north as this.

I was told, at third hand, of a Blue Whale which measured 102 ft., and similar stories are numerous; but I doubt if the whales were in any case accurately measured. Dr. Guldberg does not believe it ever attains a length of 100 ft.; a little over 80 ft. is, I believe, the longest that has been at all accurately measured at Vardö, and whales of this length are the exception. Dr. Guldberg ('Vardö Posten,' Sept. 2nd, 1883) says of this species:—"Its length varies between 70 and 80 ft.; the individuals that are 70 ft. and under, I have always found to be rather young, and not full-grown. That it can attain to a length of over 80 ft. is certainly unquestionable, although it may be very seldom. But the numerous measurements which have been taken of various individuals are not trustworthy, since they are not measured in a right line from the point of the under jaw to the cleft in the tail fin. The most characteristic feature to recognise it by when one sees it in the water, besides the high spout and conspicuous size, is the extremely small dorsal fin which is situated so far back. The colour above is blue-grey or blue-black, and sometimes copper-brown when it is seen rolling about in the sea. The dead whale* has always a more or less pronounced blue-grey or steel-grey dark colour over the back, which on the sides becomes a little lighter, with, over all, peculiar slightly striped marks of a lighter grey, which often lie in small shallow pits, which give the surface of the skin an uneven appearance. Under the belly, and especially forward near the throat, it is more or less flecked with white, with some parts alternating with grey or blacker shades. It has always a more or less marbled appearance, which in some specimens present very pretty patterns. The baleen-plates are black or grey-black, with black-brown hair.

* On this change of colour after death in cetaceans, *vide* Dr. J. Murie, 'On the Organization of the Caaing Whale,' Trans. Zool. Soc., vol. viii., p. 239; and Prof. Turner's account of the present species in Trans. Roy. Soc. Edinb., 1870, p. 203.

“How long the Blue Whale goes with young is still a riddle. Two things are certain, *viz.*, that the pairing does not take place at any fixed time of the year, and that the gestation is longer than one year. As proof of this it may be stated that in the course of fourteen days fœtuses have been found of 2, 4, and $6\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in length, coexisting at the same time of year as the pairing has been observed. From this, again, one may infer that the period of gestation was longer than one year, which is also borne out by several other things. There are, moreover, several certain observations of the fact that the young one follows the mother a long time; the mother has, for instance, been shot while accompanied by a young one of between 40 and 50 ft. I have, however, also received information that pairing has taken place notwithstanding that the mother was accompanied by its offspring. Consequently my theory is that the Blue Whale goes with young from eighteen to twenty months; this is borne out essentially by comparison with other mammals. It is a prevailing rule with whales that the size of the offspring amounts to a fourth part (or even a little more) of the mother. According to this, the newly-born young of the Finwhale would be about 15 to 16 ft. long, probably it is still larger; for, as regards the Blue Whale, the proportion must be between one-quarter and one-third, since fœtuses have been removed of 23 ft. in length. This latter species also cannot reproduce its species more frequently than every other year. This is its most favourable rate; we arrive perhaps nearer the truth when we say that the Blue Whale reproduces every third year, since there are many proofs of the fact that the young at a considerable size (up to 50 ft.) still follow the mother, and that the Finwhale reproduces every second year.”

A Blue Whale may be immediately distinguished from a Finwhale by the following external points of difference:—

SIBBALD'S RORQUAL.

A fairly stout and well-proportioned looking whale, in spite of its great length; a slightly humpbacked appearance at the shoulder.

The whole of the baleen coal-black.

No white about the body.

COMMON RORQUAL.

Looks emaciated, and much too long for its girth.

Baleen only black on outer edge, partly slate-colour and yellow.

Under side white.

Rudolphi's Rorqual (*Balenoptera borealis*, Lesson). — Norwegian names, Sildehval, Seiehval.* This, I believe, is the species most frequently taken by the whalers stationed off West Finmarken, *i. e.*, the coast to the west of North Cape. I have not with any certainty seen a living specimen of this species, and my sole acquaintance with it was a hasty glimpse at the skeleton of the example killed in the River Crouch (Essex) in November last, when it was lying in the prosector's room at the Zoological Gardens. A full account of this specimen was published by Prof. Flower (Proc. Zool. Soc. 1883, p. 513, *et seq.*). The baleen is black, with white bristles. The dorsal fin had been brought with the skeleton; it was rather higher and more curved and pointed than the Common Rorqual's. The skin was still on the flippers; the outer side was black, the under side white; they were more pointed than the common species.

Dr. Guldberg ('Vardö Posten,' Aug. 19th, 1883) says:—"We shall next pass on to the so-called Herring Whale (Sildehval), whose natural affinities are rather obscure. I am inclined, from information given me, ... to consider it as identical with the so-called Coal-fish Whale (Seiehval), which both in the summer and earlier, is taken in greater or lesser numbers in West Finmarken. The length is about 40 ft. It resembles in several respects the Finner, but is smaller, and makes its appearance on the coast of Finmarken, especially in the summer months. Since it is also observed by Bergen, and on the Dutch coast, there is every probability for the supposition that its range is more southerly than that of the Lesser Rorqual."

Lesser Rorqual (*Balenoptera rostrata*, Fabr.). — Norwegian name, Vaagehval. In sailing up the Norwegian coast during the summer months, on reaching Vest Fjord one usually sees a few small Finwhales, which are most probably of this species. They are often in company with "Spring-hvale," which I have no doubt are Bottle-nosed Dolphins (*Delphinus tursio*, Fabr.), whose gambols are very interesting to watch. Occasionally one sees somewhat larger Finwhales, and these latter may very possibly be Rudolphi's Rorqual, but I cannot speak with any certainty.

On returning south last autumn, at the end of September and beginning of October, I did not see a single whale all along the

* Dr. Guldberg, 'Vardö Posten,' Aug. 19th, 1883.

coast; whether this was in consequence of the lateness of the season, bad weather, or merely accidental, I do not know; but on my way home from Christiania, having to put in to Christiansand on October 19th through stress of weather, we saw a small whale spouting just outside the entrance to the harbour, a little to the east of Oxö Light. It seems odd that in all the passages I have made past Christiansand I should never have seen a whale thereabouts until this time when I was returning from interviewing some members of this great family in Finmarken.

This particular species does not seem to occur so far to the north as Finmarken. Dr. Guldberg ('Vardö Posten,' Aug. 19th, 1883) says of it:—"It scarcely exceeds thirty-two or thirty-three feet. The back fin is high, with the point curved backwards. The colour is black above, lighter on the sides, and under the belly white. A point, however, very characteristic of it is that the flippers or pectoral fins are black, with a broad white band in the middle. The baleen-plates are yellow, and small. On the whole it seems to have a less northerly habitat than the other larger Finwhales. Its food consists chiefly of small fish of the Capelan, Herring, and Cod families, which it pursues far up into the fjords. In the neighbourhood of Bergen it is hunted in fjords which have narrow inlets, where it is surrounded, and subsequently killed with harpoons or arrows discharged from large bows.* It is supposed that the young is born in the middle of the winter; it is then six or seven feet long; there is seldom more than one at a time."

In the season of 1883 there were nineteen whalers (including tugs) off the East Finmarken Coast, and the total number of whales (*Balenopteridæ*) taken, was 406; to the eastward again was one Russian whaler, which took 20 whales; in West Finmarken (*i. e.*, west of the North Cape) I heard there were five whalers, but I learnt nothing for certain about them or the number of whales taken; the majority of the whales killed here are, I believe, Rudolphi's Rorqual (*B. borealis*). Of the 406 taken off the East Finmarken coast, I was told on the best authority that about 50 would be Humpbacks, and the remainder—about half and half—Blue and Common Rorqual. The largest

* Examples of these somewhat primitive weapons were exhibited in the Norwegian Court of the Fisheries Exhibition in London, 1883.

number killed by one ship was 40; she, however, was attended by a tug (to tow home whales as captured, leaving the whaler herself free to continue hunting). Her managing owner told me that 19 of these were Blue Whales, 8 Humpbacks, and the remainder (13) Finners. The whaler I was out in took 37 (unattended by a tug), while the other ship belonging to the same company only took 8. In 1882 Herr Svend Foyn took, I was told, 107 whales, while this season he went off in one of his whalers to Iceland, with a view to establishing a factory on that coast;* he was "prospecting" rather than fishing, and only took two whales there; his other ship off Vadsö took 20.

Synopsis of Balænopteridæ in North European Seas.

HUMPBACKED WHALE.—Colour of body, whole upper part jet-black, including under side of the head; under side, towards tail end, black; throat, with the furrows and nearly the whole of under side, may be white, including part of under side of flukes; or may be more or less marked with white, or may be almost entirely black. Flippers very long, = 15 ft. (male about 44 ft.) to end of humerus; narrow; paddle or broad-sword shaped (*not* scimitar-shaped, as the Rorquals); deeply serrated along anterior margin; outer side may be black, or black only to extent of proximal quarter; under side cream-white. Baleen quite short, and entirely black; bristles a shade lighter, or *whiter* than the faded brown of under side of a hedgehog. Remarks:—Numerous tubercles round nose and under jaw; is always infested with *Conchoderma auritum*, L., growing on *Diadema coronula* L., and numberless *Cyami*. Very thick and robust.

COMMON RORQUAL.—Colour of body grey-blue, or greyish slate-colour on the back; the whole under side white, including the under side of the flukes; the white is only a few inches in width along the small tail part—the last few feet in front of the flukes; all the furrows included in the white, except about the uppermost row; under jaw also white; upper side of flukes dull black; width (in male rather over 40 ft.) 12 ft. Flippers remarkably short, light slate-colour, tipped with white at the extreme distal edge (but not along the side edge). Baleen black on the outer

* Vadsö is practically "used up," and Herr Foyn is removing his factory thence.

edge, then slate-colour, gradually *striping* to yellow on the inner; bristles light yellow, almost buff. Remarks:—Extremely thin and elongated, looking apparently *emaciated*.

SIBBALD'S RORQUAL.—Colour of body, upper side dark slate-blue; *no* white about the body, the under side being merely a shade lighter in colour than the upper. Flippers longer than Common Rorqual's, light slate-blue outer side, and white on the inner side. Baleen rather broader than Common Rorqual's; coal-black, including the bristles. Remarks:—Elongated, but still robust, compared with the Common Rorqual.

RUDOLPHI'S RORQUAL. — Colour of body, [Upper part black, under side white.—Southwell]. Flippers, outer side black, under side white; more pointed than the Common Rorqual's. Baleen black, the bristles white. Remarks:—Dorsal fin rather higher and more curved and pointed than the Common Rorqual's.

LESSER RORQUAL.—Colour of body, [Upper part black, under side white. Flippers black, with broad band of white across. Baleen yellowish white. Remarks:—Dorsal fin high.—Southwell].

NOTES AND QUERIES.

MAMMALIA.

Photographing a Tiger.—A correspondent to a Madras paper writes as follows:—"So far as I can ascertain, a photograph of a Tiger in the act of striking down a large animal was never taken until this week, when I secured a negative of a Tiger killing a Buffalo. I had focussed on the Buffalo, which was tied to the stump of a tree in the middle of a field, and had just put a dry plate in the camera, when a Tiger came up and struck down the Buffalo with a single blow of his paw. My camera was not ten yards from the Buffalo, and the Tiger might just as well have come at me, if he had chosen to do so, but fortunately he selected the Buffalo instead, and then I took advantage of my position and released the spring shutter just as he had given the Buffalo his knock-down blow. The negative, I am sorry to say, is not a good one, but it is nevertheless interesting, because it throws some light on that vexed question, 'How does a Tiger kill his prey?' In the photograph, which I have before me as I write, the Tiger is seen standing on his hind legs, which are bent; his body is inclined to the ground at an angle of about 45 deg.; his tail is straight, except the tip, which is curled upwards; and the right fore paw is seen above and the left below the Buffalo's neck. The head of the Buffalo covers the shoulder and heart

of the Tiger, whose head appears above his horns; his back is nearly level, but his front legs are doubled up under him and he is just in the act of falling. The head is drooping and lifeless, and the whole appearance of the Buffalo tends to confirm the generally accepted opinion, that the Tiger with his knock-down blow dislocates the neck of his victim."

Porpoise in the Thames.—On the last day of September some excitement was caused among the watermen plying on the river and persons walking along its banks, by the appearance of a Porpoise, which was seen to be ascending with the tide near Westminster. A number of shots were fired at it, but ultimately the pursuit ceased with the disappearance of its object. Later in the day, however, a Porpoise, believed to have been the one shot at in the morning, was captured by a bargeman, who struck it with his boathook off the Sufferance and Providence Wharf, Lambeth. When taken ashore, it was found to be about five feet in length and to weigh three-quarters of a hundredweight.

BIRDS.

Ruffs and Reeves in Lincolnshire.—It is worth recording that on September 12th I saw a flock of Ruffs and Reeves in the Great Cotes marshes, the latter apparently being very considerably in excess of the males. They rose from a large grass walk in company with eight young Curlews, but separated from them almost immediately, pitching alone in the next field. There must have been at least twenty, probably more, but they flew so closely—all in a lump—that I did not count them. On the 18th I saw a Ruff and seven Reeves, and also a single Ruff. The young Curlews come over by hundreds, in parties of seven to ten, in the bare summer-eaten clover walks and grass marshes at dusk every evening to feed, returning, with much noisy clamour, just at daybreak. They find numerous small coleopterous insects in the dried-up dung, from which source in this dry season their main supply of food appears to be drawn. The recent strong east winds have brought several immigrants on to the coast, including Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts, also large flights of Linnets and Greenfinches.—JOHN CORDEAUX (Great Cotes, Ulceby).

Breeding of the Ruff in Lancashire.—I wish to correct an erroneous impression originating in a statement made by Pennant ('British Zoology,' vol. ii. p. 75, footnote), that Ruffs "visit a place called Martin Mere, in Lancashire, the latter end of March or beginning of April, but do not continue there above three weeks." I have, in my opinion, conclusive evidence that the Ruff bred on the Mere within the last fifty years. Several of the oldest Mere-men now living, who have been close observers of the birds of the district and are keen wildfowlers, say positively that they have seen birds during the whole of the summer, have noticed them assume and

throw off the Ruff, and have often seen them at the "hill." One, William Parker, of Crosuns, near Southport, caught—between thirty and forty years ago—a young Ruff which could not fly; this he kept for several days in a walled-in garden; it was then killed by a game-cock. I have now in my possession two males which were taken on the Mere about forty years ago, by the late Henry Canner, gamekeeper to the late Sir Thomas Hesketh. Both birds have the ruffs and auricles fully developed, and one has the tubercles very prominent. Selby (Brit. Ornithology, vol. ii. p. 131) states that "The papillæ, or small fleshy tubercles, that cover the face and the region of the eyes during the height of the season (and which are ascertained by experiments on birds kept in confinement, to be only consequent on sexual connection) also disappear." Montagu says, "it is evident that the bare papillous head is only attendant on venery." According to these authorities, then, one of my birds must have paired, and as this takes place in the immediate vicinity of the future nesting-place, the evidence in support of my contention is conclusive.—ROBERT J. HOWARD (Blackburn).

Shearwaters on the Rock of Filfola.—Filfola is an islet between two and three miles from the S.W. coast of Malta; it is reached by hiring a small boat at a fishing village near Zurico, but landing is impossible with the slightest swell. It is a precipitous limestone, not covering more than perhaps half an acre, surrounded with *débris*, the fragments sometimes being of great size; amongst these fragments grows a coarse herbage, apparently of the nature somewhat of samphire, in great abundance. Filfola is the breeding haunt of the Mediterranean Shearwater (*Puffinus Kuhli*), the Manx Shearwater (*P. anglorum*), the Storm Petrel (*Procellaria pelagica*), and the Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*). I visited this rock with a friend on the 5th and 12th April last. We found *P. anglorum* breeding in some numbers; they appeared to breed in a colony of about ten or fifteen yards radius; immediately outside this radius we could find none, though if we had had opportunity to search further we might probably have found more, but on the occasion of both our visits circumstances prevented our longer stay on the islet; on the last occasion we had great difficulty in embarking on account of the heavy swell. We only found on one occasion a hole proper selected as a breeding-place, and this was about five feet from the ground in the face of the rock; it extended twelve or fifteen feet, and terminated in a small fissure, too small for egress. The egg was about three feet and a half from the entrance, and two birds, presumably male and female, were with it. The favourite position for the egg was in the natural recesses formed by the overhanging herbage, or in the roomy and cool chambers underneath the fragments. Sometimes a few dried stalks were used as a quasi-nest, but more often there was no pretence of one, not even a hollow. We took two birds from off their egg, both of which on dissection proved to be males. We also found a few *Puffinus Kuhli* asleep

under rocks; one of a pair we killed was a female with the ovaries very little developed. The bill of *Puffinus anglorum* does not do much damage, as I found by making the experiment; but, judging from the care which the Maltese boatmen took to keep their fingers out of reach of *P. Kuhli*, I fancy it is able to inflict a severe wound; we did not care to prove it. We found several empty egg-shells with a hole at the top—I expect the work of the Lizards, which swarm on the rock. The eggs we took on the 13th were very much incubated; in fact, some of them appeared within twenty-four hours of hatching. We found no newly-hatched young birds. There are a few rabbits on the islet, which I am told, as one would expect, are very inferior eating. How they obtain enough food to sustain life I do not know.—E. F. BECHER, Capt. R.A.

Dipper's Nest on the top of a Boulder.—That many birds build their nests in what seem to us odd places is well known and perhaps in this respect the Dipper is one of the most eccentric. Not to mention cases of which I have heard and read, I have myself seen their nests in very extraordinary, nay almost incredible, places. In this I think the one I have now to notice will in a measure bear me out. In a river near here, and about midway in the stream, there lies, amongst others, a small boulder, which shows a foot or so above the usual current, and has a very slight depression on the top. Here a pair of Water Crows commenced their nest, and by some extraordinary means succeeded in rearing a home for themselves and their young. When finished, although it heightened the appearance of the boulder considerably, yet, from the shape and colour of the materials used, the nest could scarcely be distinguished from the boulder. It was discovered by the merest chance by a gentleman whilst fishing. The river at this spot is very bare, having no bank of any height, bush, nor tree near; yet the nest, although completely exposed to every gust of wind and rain, nevertheless withstood the fury of the elements for at least three months. By this time a family of four had been reared, and with their parents had departed elsewhere. The nest would have stood longer, but was removed to be preserved as a memorial of the strange place where built. The removal, however, proved a much more difficult matter than was anticipated. On the attempt being made, the nest was found to be so firmly attached, cemented on as it were to the stone, that it took some considerable time and trouble to detach it. On being minutely examined, it appeared from its construction to be impervious to rain.—THOMAS EDWARD (Banff).

Wood Sandpiper in Nottinghamshire.—During the first week in August I heard that the Mansfield Reservoir was very low, and as this is the time Sandpipers visit us, I took a walk over, and found that nearly twenty acres were turned into mud-flats. I could see several waders about, so got the keeper to bring his gun, and after a drive or two he was fortunate

enough to shoot a nice specimen of the Wood Sandpiper, a rare bird in this county, this being only the third authentic occurrence. I also saw Green and Common Sandpipers and Ringed Plovers, besides a lot of Coots and a few Tufted Ducks.—J. WHITAKER (Rainworth, Mansfield).

Ruddy Sheldrake on Romney Marsh.—A Ruddy Sheldrake was killed on September 8th, by John Southerden, at the Midripps in Romney Marsh, Kent, about twelve miles from Rye. It was brought, for preservation, to Mr. Bristowe, naturalist, of Silchester Road, St. Leonards-on-Sea. I have seen the bird. Bristowe informed me that it was a male, but the black band round the neck is entirely absent, and it has the head of a light buff, which all point to its being a female. Can it be an immature male?—THOMAS PARKIN (The Vicarage, Halton, Hastings).

Bittern, White-fronted Goose, and Black Tern in Berkshire.—I saw this summer at Sir R. F. Sutton's, at Benham Park, a Bittern obtained in November, 1883, under rather singular circumstances. When shooting the duck preserves at Kintbury,—about one hundred acres of reeds, willows, and alders, with intersecting streams, close to the Kennet, and called the "Wilderness,"—the Bittern rose from a thick bed of reeds and dashed in the face of one of the beaters; the man, alarmed for his eyes, which he said the bird struck at, knocked it over with his stick, breaking its legs, and then succeeded in capturing it. A fine old male White-fronted Goose was shot in the same locality, by Sir R. F. Sutton, on December 24th, 1879, and more recently an immature Black Tern.—JOHN CORDEAUX (Great Cotes, Ulceby).

Black Pomatorhine Skua at Redcar.—One of my fisherman friends, Kit Dobson, brought me a Pomatorhine Skua on October 4th, which he had shot at sea off Redcar: it is the black melanistic variety, resembling those first recorded by me as having been obtained here in October, 1879. The plumage is sooty black on the back; breast a shade lighter; the neck is rather moulty and thin of feathers, but the new ones appearing are very deep black, and have no appearance of yellow, which I have noticed on one or two dark birds. The state of the bill and the obtuse projecting tail-feathers show that the bird is a mature specimen. Gannets have been very plentiful off Redcar this season, young ones predominating, and a considerable number were shot during September and the early part of October. An adult Sandwich Tern was obtained in August. Mr. Fox Chilton noticed the first Wigeon on Cowpen Marsh on August 28th, and early in September he shot a Spotted Crake in Saltholme. Three Pigmy Curlews were shot at the Tees mouth about the end of September. I noticed the first Hooded Crow on October 5th, when a flight came from seaward. Short-eared Owls, Woodcocks, and Goldcrests have been dropping in during the past few days. Ducks have been passing almost daily for the

past month. On October 6th I noticed considerable flocks coming up from the East, and a solitary Goosander passed about a hundred yards away.—T. H. NELSON (Redcar).

Building Sites of the House Martin.—In looking over the last volume of 'The Zoologist,' I notice a paragraph with this heading, mentioning three nesting localities of the Martin among cliffs. May I add another? The high road from Conway to Bangor, soon after leaving Conway, passes under Pen-maen-bach, a bold headland of slate projecting into the sea. In September last I saw several Martins flying about the face of the cliff, which at this place overhangs the road, and, after a little watching, traced an old bird to its nest of young built far up under a ledge of rock.—HENRY CANDLER (Epsom, Surrey).

Kingfisher in London.—On Sunday, October 5th, while standing on the bridge over the Regent's Canal, close to St. Mark's Church, Regent's Park, I saw to my astonishment a Kingfisher dart up the water. It flew on until it reached the bridge in the Zoological Gardens, when it swerved in amongst the overhanging trees, and I did not see it again. As viewed against the dark olive-green surface of the water it looked beautiful. I have since ascertained that some five and twenty years ago, when the sewage from the Zoological Gardens drained out into the canal by a clump of sedge, Kingfishers used to come there to feed on the numerous small fish which were attracted by the sewage. Since then the sedge has been cut and cleared away, and the Kingfishers have deserted this former haunt.—CHARLES WHYMPER (55, Fitzroy Road, Regent's Park).

Breeding of *Fratercula arctica* on the Burlings.—In 'The Ibis,' 1871, p. 402, Mr. Howard Saunders, in his valuable paper on the Birds of Southern Spain, writes with reference to the Puffin, "The most southern breeding-place with which I am acquainted is at the Berlengas, or Farallones, a group of rocks in the Atlantic, a trifle to the north of the latitude of Lisbon." I find the following reference to these rocks and their fauna in Captain Boteler's 'Recollections from 1808 to 1830' (London, 1833). In 1826 Captain (then Lieutenant) Boteler, R.N., was in command of H.M.S. 'Syra,' belonging to the squadron in the Tagus. At p. 171 he writes:—"Another time I was sent to survey the Burlings, four or five islands of rock, three or four miles off Cape Peniche. There was a remarkable cave that I entered with my gig, disturbing myriads of sea pigeons, puffin, and bats, and I found to my surprise that the cavern went right through that point of the island."—H. W. FEILDEN.

Reported Occurrence of Cranes near Clitheroe.—Two of these birds have been seen near Clitheroe by Mr. R. Milne-Redhead, Bolton-by-Bowland, who has kindly furnished me with the following particulars:—On the 25th August last, about 4 p.m., he saw from his window, with the

naked eye, a Crane, *Grus communis*, flying S.S.E., and on looking through his glass he distinctly saw a second travelling in the same direction. He made a note at the time, and entered the weather as "brilliantly fine and clear, air cooler; bar. 29.55." We had a prevalence of easterly winds for some time previously. He further states that he is perfectly familiar with the appearance of the bird, having often seen it in Germany, Alsace, &c. Although the Cranes, when seen by Mr. Milne-Redhead, were not actually in Lancashire, their line of flight would in a few minutes have taken them over the boundary, and I think we may now consider Lancashire as one of the counties visited by this bird during the present century.—ROBERT J. HOWARD (Blackburn).

Early appearance of Wild Geese in Ireland.—On October 10th we had a cold north wind and hail showers—a sudden change from the recent genial weather. Being out on an upland district near this, about 4 p.m., with a friend well acquainted with *Anser albifrons*, and my keeper, we all recognised and watched eight Geese, which came from a northerly inland direction, flying about 200 or 300 feet high, and passed near us. They were unquestionably Wild Geese, probably the above species. I also saw on the same day a flock of Golden Plover, for the first time this autumn. Though the same bitter wind continued, Swallows, *Hirundo rustica*, were still to be seen on October 11th. Some usually stay with us until the end of this month.—R. J. USSHER (Cappagh, Co. Waterford).

Spoonbills in Suffolk.—Early in August four Spoonbills were seen to pitch on a marsh at Hollesley, Suffolk. A local gunner named Langmaid went in pursuit, and was fortunate enough to shoot two of them; these were sold to a gentleman in London. On September 9th a Grey Phalarope was killed at Felixstowe. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was obtained near this town on October 7th. On the same day I saw a Woodcock exposed for sale, and on making enquiry as to where it had been killed, I was informed that it was seen to fly from an apple tree into some cabbages in a garden in this town, where it was afterwards flushed and shot.—J. H. H. KNIGHTS (Ipswich).

Dipper in Sussex.—A Dipper was shot, on September 13th, on the Salts at Bopeep, St. Leonards-on-Sea, an unusual place for a bird of this species; and a Dotterel was obtained at Lydd at the end of August.—THOMAS PARKIN (The Vicarage, Halton, Hastings).

Grey form of the Tawny Owl in Buckinghamshire.—A specimen of the grey form of *Syrnium aluco* was shot at Great Horwood, near Winslow, Bucks, in July last, and sent to Mr. Wyatt, taxidermist, Banbury. The bird is small, with a decidedly long tail, and is extremely grey, with the white markings conspicuous and no trace of rufous or tawny. A keeper from Yeovil noticed it in Mr. Wyatt's shop, and remarked that only similar

grey birds were found there, whereas neither Mr. Wyatt nor I have ever seen an entirely grey bird from this neighbourhood. The males of the common rufous form are all more or less greyish brown.—F. C. APLIN (Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon).

FISHES.

Balistes capriscus off Folkestone.—Two species of the genus *Balistes* common in the Atlantic are occasionally met with on the British coasts, *B. capriscus* and *B. maculatus*. Their popular names "File-fish" and "Trigger-fish" are derived from peculiarities thus described by Dr. Günther in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica' (9th ed.), under the name "File-fish":—"Their body is compressed and not covered with ordinary scales, but with small juxtaposed scutes. Their other principal characteristics consist in the structure of their first dorsal fin (which consists of three spines) and in their peculiar dentition. The first of the three dorsal spines is very strong, roughened in front like a file, and hollowed out behind to receive the second much smaller spine, which besides has a projection in front at its base, fitting into a notch of the first. Thus these two spines can only be raised or depressed simultaneously, in such a manner that the first cannot be forced down unless the second has been previously depressed. The latter has been compared to a trigger, hence the name of "Trigger-fish." The generic name *Balistes* and the Italian name *Pesce balistra* also refer to this structure. Both jaws are armed with strong incisor-like and sometimes pointed teeth, by which these fishes are enabled not only to break off pieces of madreporæ and other corals on which they feed, but also to chisel a hole into the hard shells of Mollusca in order to extract the soft parts. In this way they destroy an immense number of mollusks, and become most injurious to the pearl-fisheries. The specimen of *Balistes capriscus* to which this note refers was captured in a trawl on the 27th September last in the bay between Folkestone and Dungeness Point. When fresh it was of a dull slate-colour, and measured $10\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth, excluding the fins. It was forwarded from Folkestone to Mr. Tegetmeier, who in 'The Field' of the 4th October last has given a brief account of it.—J. E. HARTING.

Ray swallowing a Crayfish.—At Sennen Cove, near the Land's End, one day in September, a large Ray of some sort was captured. Its belly was unusually distended, so much so that Mr. James B. Coulson, my informant (a seine owner there) caused the fish to be opened, and in its stomach was found a Crayfish, or Common Spiny Lobster, *Palinurus vulgaris*, of considerable size. I have no doubt of the accuracy of this information, and those who know the capacity of the mouth of the Rays for lateral extension (or gape) will not doubt their ability to swallow Crayfish, but surely this cannot be of common occurrence.—THOS. CORNISH (Penzance).

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